# Mapping and bridging the gender gap: An ethnographic study of Indian Wikipedians and their motivations to contribute

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## THE ISSUE

- Only 3% of the Wikipedia editors from India are women (WMF research, 2011)

- Women face barriers in discovering and editing Wikipedia such as lack of internet access, lack of discretionary time, lesser internet skills, less self-confidence, real or perceived harassment, lack of role models, inability to withstand Wikipedia's polemical culture and double standards towards women editors.

- Gender gap in content and participation has been evaluated mainly in English Wikipedia, but not well studied in Indian language Wikipedias.

- Internet penetration in India is projected to increase sharply by 2021, from 28% to 59% out of which majority of the new users will be women.

## METHOD

- This is a pilot study on gender mapping in the Indian context. Nine persons were interviewed so far.

- Semi-structured questionnaires were used to probe the research question through interviews.

- Each interview lasted for 45-90 minutes and was carried out either face to face or over video conferencing.

- Wikipedians (mostly women) working on a variety of aspects of Wikipedia, such as content creation, outreach, GLAM and administration were interviewed.

- The responses were collated into categories with reference to the research questions, such as 'motivations', 'barriers' and 'solutions'.

## PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

### Barriers

The most recurring theme was women's lack of discretionary time for contributing to Wikipedia, making them prefer to undertake 'lighter' activities that provide entertainment, such as watching TV.

Internet use of young women are monitored by parents, while older women generally lack the technical skills to contribute to Wikipedia.

Women do not possess devices for internet use compared to men of similar age groups and socioeconomic status. The use of a shared device is mostly dictated by an elder male family member.

Women face restrictions in traveling, especially during nights, which keeps them from conducting and participating in outreach events.

Women have less self-confidence compared to men, creating an internal barrier where they constantly question their editing skills despite their good knowledge.

Women face harassment and often get little support.

### Motivations

Several women contributed because of their commitment to the founding principle of democratizing knowledge.

It was important for some women to share the knowledge about the specific topics they know with the world.

The exciting part for some women was the sharing of knowledge in their mother tongues, which they perceived as useful for those who can't understand English.

Some were excited about sharing forms of knowledge other than written, like audio clips and photographs.

Some women were dedicated to the cause of women's representation on the internet and wrote women's biographies on Wikipedia.

Some women were motivated by the satisfaction they get in sharing free knowledge.

Certain women saw Wikipedia as a trial ground where they can hone their writing and leadership skills.

### Solutions

Bridging the gender gap should be a two pronged strategy: recruiting new women editors and retaining the existing ones.

Editing workshops and similar outreach events are a good way to attract women editors.

Experienced editors are motivated by regular meetups, where they can edit topics of mutual interest. Support groups also keep women active on Wikipedia.

When outreach events are led by women, newcomers can identify female role models, guides and mentors. So, more women should be trained to become program leaders.

Misogyny is common in tech spaces, so there is a need for sensitization to be more inclusive and considerate to others. As tech spaces become more inclusive, more diversity can be attracted.

Outreach activities are best done in a university setup, with students as the main benefactors.

## CONCLUSIONS AND THE WAY FORWARD

Traditional gender roles are still strong in the Indian society and these need to be constantly overcome by women who participate in online spaces. Retaining women contributors is as important as getting new editors.

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